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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [ECON](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: KARZAI URGES DEPUTY SECRETARY TO SUPPORT ZARDARI,
UPBEAT ABOUT INCOMING US FORCES

Classified By: DCM Christopher Dell, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C). In his 12/10 meeting with the Deputy Secretary, President Karzai urged the United States to give Pakistani President Zardari more political and economic backing to strengthen his hand in reforming the Pakistani military and intelligence services. Karzai welcomed the upcoming increase in U.S. troops, urged us to deploy them mostly to the South (particularly Helmand), and made little mention of civilian casualties. Karzai was optimistic about economic developments in Afghanistan, particularly on reconstruction outside of Kabul. On reconciliation, he said Iran may be trying to undermine the Saudi initiative, though there were no new developments to undermine. He agreed fall elections would be in the best interests of the country.

Pakistan: US needs to help Zardari

¶2. (C) Karzai told the Deputy that Zardari needed more help from the United States. &He feels left alone.8 Zardari was a leader willing to take risks) he was a &gutsy fellow8) but needed greater political and financial backing from the United States. Karzai urged the United States to &make Pakistan,s bank full,8 both to attract foreign investment and to strengthen Zardari,s hand to reform the military and ISI. Karzai believed Zardari was starting to get labeled &anti-Pakistan8 by some in the Pakistani media because he was going against the army.

¶3. (C) Karzai characterized his relations with both Zardari and PM Gilani as excellent, and said that tone was carrying through to relations between the countries, respective foreign ministers and national security advisors. He would take a &wait and see8 posture on relations between intelligence agencies, though he noted that NDS Director Saleh had met ISI Director General Pasha in November.

¶4. (C) The Deputy and Karzai condemned the Mumbai terrorist incident. Karzai did not believe ISI had ceased support for Lashkar-e-Tabiya. If ISI were telling the truth, however, he was troubled over how it could be blind to such sophisticated training occurring in Pakistan. Karzai said Zardari and Gilani both sought improved ties to India. The Deputy agreed improved ties were in Pakistan,s interest, particularly given Pakistan,s economic problems. Karzai was unhappy the Saudis were not providing any economic help to Pakistan and asserted the PRC was withholding financial support because Zardari had spoken publicly about improving ties with India.

Karzai welcomes U.S. troop increase) send them to Helmand

¶5. (C) Karzai called 2008 a difficult year in the fight against the Taliban. The Deputy told Karzai that our planned troop increase in the coming year affirmed the U.S. commitment to continue working with Afghanistan on the security front. Karzai urged the United States to deploy the troops to the South, where the insecurity was the worst, with a particular emphasis on Helmand. Karzai asserted that the United States should never have left Helmand or Kandahar.

¶6. (C) The Deputy affirmed that Washington had the funding to support expansion of the Afghan army, the two countries had a plan, and the plan was working. Karzai welcomed U.S. assistance on training, and hoped we could accelerate the training timeline. Karzai agreed with the Deputy's suggestion that a larger Afghan force could reduce the risk of civilian casualties. Karzai recommended the two countries concentrate on strengthening the police. Reform of the judiciary, on the other hand, would take time.

¶7. (C) The Deputy welcomed the troop increases for both the United States and the Afghan army. He hoped the strengthened security forces would enable Afghanistan to give some more energy to the counter-narcotics effort. Karzai contended that Afghanistan had done well last year in areas where it exercised control, citing Nangarhar and Badakhshan. He stated that Helmand was the center of the disease. Cure things there and Afghanistan would be in perfect shape, Karzai claimed.

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Karzai upbeat on economic situation

¶8. (U) Karzai was enthusiastic about economic developments in the country, particularly outside of Kabul. Many rural Afghans had told him they were happy with new infrastructure) roads, schools, clinics. To measure commercial developments, he regularly asked local officials about numbers of small shops in their districts. He cited one Paktya district that went from 400 shops in 2002 to 1600 in ¶2005. A village in Kapisa went from zero shops in 2004 to 380 this year.

¶9. (SBU) Karzai pointed to an increase in annual government revenues from USD 120 million in 2003 to USD 800 million in ¶2008. He also claimed Afghanistan had USD 3.4 billion in reserves, more than Pakistan had.

Reconciliation: Minimal activity

¶10. (C) Karzai told the Deputy there had been no new developments on reconciliation since the 9/14 trilateral meeting among King Abdullah, Zardari and Karzai. He characterized the Saudi-led effort as his own initiative. He welcomed the Saudis, role, given their influence over the Taliban, and was pleased with improved Saudi-Afghan ties. He believed those strengthened relations had resulted in increased contact with others in the Arab world, including Egypt, as well as cooler ties with Iran. Karzai told the Deputy about reports that Iran was trying to meet with Pakistan in Dubai to conceive a plan to undermine the Saudi reconciliation effort.

¶11. (C) Karzai said progress on the Saudi initiative was slow because the King was cautious. Karzai sensed the United States was not fully backing the Saudi effort. He urged the United States not only to back the Saudis, but also to become more involved (nfi).

¶12. (C) Karzai reaffirmed that Afghanistan would undertake reconciliation only within the country's constitutional framework. He raised his public pledge to protect Mullah Omar if he agreed to talks. Karzai interpreted the absence of a response as a sign that Omar had no authority to respond, and therefore the Taliban was a leaderless movement. Who was then directing the movement? Karzai asserted the trail led back to the Pakistani ISI.

Fall election date better on security grounds

¶13. (C) Karzai informed the Deputy that he had given the Independent Election Commission full authority to set the election date. The constitution called for a spring date, but there had been a political agreement last April to set the date for fall 2009. Karzai argued that a spring date would be better for him, as there would be no question over expired executive authorities if the election were held after his term (according to the constitution) expired in May. For security of the election and stability of the country, however, a fall date would be in the best interest of the country.

¶14. The Deputy Secretary's party cleared this cable.
DELL